

## **APPENDIX D**

### **SUMMARY OF PUBLIC COMMENTS RECEIVED DURING THE SCOPING PROCESS ON THE LOS ANGELES-TO-PALMDALE HIGH-SPEED TRAIN PROJECT**



# Los Angeles to Palmdale High-Speed Rail Line Scoping Phase

## *Summary of Comments Received*

The public comment period for the scoping process conducted for the proposed Los Angeles to Palmdale High-Speed Rail Line began on March 15, 2007 and ended on April 24, 2007. Comments were gathered at elected official briefings, stakeholder group presentations, and public meetings. A variety of collection instruments were used to obtain public comment including comment sheets, formal letters from groups and individuals, and verbal comments.

Thirty-three written comment forms and letters and numerous verbal comments were received from various stakeholder groups including elected officials, community, business and environmental groups, and private citizens.

### **Key Themes**

Upon review of the comments received during the scoping process, several key themes emerged regarding the proposed project. These themes appear in order of their prevalence in the comments received.

#### Alignment

Some stakeholders expressed concern over the potential impacts the proposed alignment could have on the communities along the corridor, especially the outlying communities of Santa Clarita, Palmdale, Acton, and Agua Dulce. Concerns were also raised regarding how the train would traverse the canyon areas (including Soledad Canyon) via the Sylmar to Palmdale portion of the proposed route, while maintaining high speeds.

Stakeholders asked whether other alignments had been previously considered and requested to be provided with additional alignment choices that would allow for existing train tracks to be moved to areas that would minimize their impacts on underground streams and public walkways. Others indicated the need for clarification on:

- The exact alignment and location of the train tracks being proposed
- If the high-speed rail line would have its own dedicated set of tracks
- If not, what would the impacts be of industrial and Metrolink trains sharing the same tracks as the high-speed rail line?

Questions and concerns raised by Los Angeles Council Member Ed Reyes' office and several area stakeholders regarding the proposed alignment through the northeastern Los Angeles area include:



- Concerns regarding the appropriateness of the Programmatic EIR/EIS narrowing the available options down to one particular route
- Concerns that the published NOI states the alignment will follow SR-58/Soledad Canyon from the City of Palmdale to Sylmar and then along the Metrolink rail line to Union Station
- The Council Member's request that the corridor from Sylmar to Union Station in the Programmatic EIR/EIS be identified as an area for further study was inadequately responded to
- The Council Member has the understanding that the corridor from Burbank to Union Station will now be considered for further study, but, in his opinion, seems too small to offer many viable alternatives
- The alignment selection process needs to be open and transparent
- Is it too late or costly to look at other possible alignments?
- Why is the alignment being limited to one corridor when there are two possible freeway alternatives?
- Why was this route selected?
- Does capacity exist at Union Station?
- Implement transit-oriented development near Union Station
- Was consideration given to alignments going down the I-5, I-10, or I-210 freeways?
- The project needs to review opportunities for connectivity between high-speed rail and the Los Angeles River
- Concerns regarding the alignment running alongside the Los Angeles River in the Cypress Park area, and near Cornfield State Park and El Rio de Los Angeles State Park (commonly referred to as Taylor Yard)
- The State has made a significant investment in northeastern Los Angeles with the creation of the two State parks, and this should preclude using the existing Metrolink right-of-way
- Place a section of the tracks on Elysian Park land where the old rail lines used to operate, in order to avoid the Taylor Yard area
- The Los Angeles Community College District (LACCD) is proposing to open a satellite college on San Fernando Road, near Fletcher Avenue
- The Los Angeles Unified School District is planning to open a new high school in the Taylor Yards area
- The Glassell Park area is in the midst of revitalization and historic preservation efforts for the nearby Van de Kamp site
- The soccer fields in the Taylor Yard area are used for recreational purposes by local youth and help keep them off the streets
- Will you work with the community to get input on the preferred alignment prior to doing the Draft EIR/EIS?
- Clearly defined alignments should be made available to the public prior to the next set of public meetings.



General stakeholder comments regarding the current project alignment include:

- Place the alignment along the I-210, US 101 (through Universal City), SR-170, or SR-134 freeways
- Place the alignment along I-5 through the Grapevine
- Have the alignment come down off of the Vincent grade, through the less populated area of Palmdale, to Vincent Station
- Have the alignment connect to Palmdale Regional Airport
- The SR-138 bypass in Palmdale was supposed to connect to Technology Drive and provide access for the high-speed rail line and Palmdale Regional Airport
- How is high-speed rail proposing to go from Sylmar to Palmdale?

Upon reviewing the alignment maps, stakeholders informed the project team that current zoning along the San Fernando Road corridor is in the process of being changed from industrial and commercial use to mixed-use housing, retail, and commercial, and that new boundaries had been established for Elysian Park, including a pie-shaped addition of 18 acres along Riverside Drive, northwest of Stadium Way. They raised concerns that the proposed alignment might negatively impact the park experience and the wildlife present in the area.

#### Right-of-Way

Regarding right-of-way throughout the corridor, several stakeholders questioned whether the high-speed rail line would use Metrolink's existing right-of-way or if additional right-of-way would be needed. If additional right-of way is needed:

- How much would be needed?
- What percentage of the project would use existing right-of-way and what percentage would need to be acquired?
- How would this land be acquired?
- Is there a process in place to reserve this land?
- Would there be issues related to eminent domain?
- Does the California High-Speed Rail Authority have the power of eminent domain?
- Acquiring right-of-way in the Santa Clarita area could become an issue.

#### Funding

Throughout the scoping process, several elected officials and their staff members raised questions regarding:

- The status of the high-speed rail project's current and future funding
- The total cost of the project
- The amount of federal money available
- The amount of money available for high-speed rail in the current fiscal year
- The amount needed to be able to move the project forward
- If existing and new transportation bonds could be used to fund the project



- If the County of Los Angeles would be providing funds toward the project
- If the environmental analysis would assess the potential of the project to generate private funding
- If taxpayers would have to choose between the high-speed rail project and other local transportation projects or would transportation funding be shared among all of these projects.

Questions and comments raised by elected officials and stakeholders regarding the 2008 bond issue include:

- How likely is the bond to make it to the ballot?
- How much is being requested?
- Will the measure require a two-thirds vote for passage?
- Has the Governor traditionally included high-speed rail in the annual state budget?
- Have any attempts been made to counter efforts to postpone the bond?
- What do current public opinion polls say regarding this issue?
- What is the viability of funding beyond 2008?
- If the bond passes, when will the project be completed?
- What would the next step be if voters do not approve the bond?
- Is this bond solely for the high-speed rail project or is it part of a larger transportation bill that will include other projects?
- Most people in the Antelope Valley are not going to support the bond measure
- This bond is not realistic and will most likely be delayed, thereby stalling the progress of this project.

With regard to project funding, some stakeholders questioned whether or not the public is ready to support a \$40 billion project, and if high-speed rail would be self-sufficient or would require operating subsidies. Others worried that high oil prices could impact the feasibility of this project.

Additional questions and comments raised by stakeholders include:

- The project needs to determine the ability of the railroad lines to provide partial project funding
- What is the amount of funding needed to solely construct the Los Angeles to Palmdale segment of the high-speed rail line?
- How much would it cost to maintain the high-speed rail system?
- What happens if the project goes over budget?
- Use a financing structure similar to what was used for the Alameda Corridor
- Spend the \$40 billion for the project in one of the local economically-blighted areas to provide high-paying jobs for citizens.



### Design

Given the number of Maglev (magnetic levitation) projects currently being discussed for the Southern California region, several questions and comments were raised including:

- Why is this technology not being proposed for use on the statewide high-speed rail system?
- The Authority needs to consider using a new generation of technology for this system, in hopes of future expansion
- What is the relationship between this project and several Maglev projects being proposed throughout the region, including the Orange Line Maglev project proposed for the Santa Clarita area and several Maglev projects proposed to connect Southern California and Las Vegas, Nevada?
- Will Maglev trains be able to use the high-speed rail infrastructure?
- Will Maglev and high-speed rail be competing for the same ridership?
- The project needs to provide information on the differences between Maglev and steel-wheel-on-steel-rail technology.

General questions and comments raised by stakeholders regarding design are:

- Will existing Metrolink facilities be improved as a result of the high-speed rail project?
- Where will the source of the electricity needed to power these trains come from?
- Will these trains have the ability to avoid possible derailment?
- What will the designs of each proposed station look like?
- What will the parking options and fees be for each station?
- Parking should be provided for bicycles and non-motorized travel
- Train cars should include storage space for bicycles
- Incorporate sustainable practices for the design, construction, and operation of the system
- Areas that will undergo electrification should include solar energy stations and should incorporate renewable energy solutions
- What will the process be for baggage handling?
- Is there a cargo component to this proposed train service?
- Amtrak has had a difficult time moving goods. How will high-speed rail overcome these types of problems?
- Isn't this project going to theoretically replace some of Amtrak's rail service?
- What will the travel times be for high-speed rail?
- What is the process for engaging the community in the station development process?

### Environmental Issues

Potential impacts to the Los Angeles River remained a top concern among many Los Angeles area stakeholders, as well as the local City Council Member, with many questioning whether the Los Angeles River and the Revitalization Master Plan are being considered in the planning process for high-speed rail, and wanting assurances that access to the river will be maintained throughout the city's boundaries and that all mitigations deemed necessary for the project will come to fruition.



Some asked for detailed information on any potential benefits the high-speed rail system would offer river area communities.

Another major issue for Los Angeles area stakeholders is protecting and reducing impacts to Cornfield State Park and El Rio de Los Angeles State Park (commonly referred to as Taylor Yard).

In Palmdale, some stakeholders questioned why the City of Palmdale still uses an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) from 1990 in evaluating the current area surrounding the Palmdale Transportation Center, and requested that a Blue Waterline Study and a study of the SR-138 rail bypass be conducted to examine potential impacts to the seasonal creek/pond near the Center.

Other environmental issues and concerns raised along the corridor regarding the proposed high-speed rail line include:

- Environmental justice issues and their relation to the prioritization of alternatives that avoid these impacts
- A reduction in speed as the train enters highly urbanized areas like Los Angeles, allowing greater flexibility in designing the track, alignment, and station locations
- Impacts of extreme weather conditions on the high-speed rail system
- Impacts of the electricity needs of the system on the state's overall power grid
- Impacts of this project on humans and animal species
- Impacts of toxic fumes from high-speed rail stations on surrounding neighborhoods
- Impacts of the high-speed rail system on nearby schools, parks, and hospitals
- Impacts of the high-speed rail system on crime
- Impacts of tunneling on contaminated water and the underground water table near the Los Angeles River
- Impacts on fairy shrimp and the natural habitats of coyotes and Mojave ground squirrels near the Palmdale Transportation Center
- Protecting wildlife movement and habitat in rural areas and connecting the two sides of the San Gabriel National Forest
- Maintaining access to national forests in the corridor area
- Impacts on Soledad Canyon and the Santa Clara River
- Impacts on the Pacific Crest Trail
- Possible liquefaction along the Los Angeles River
- Noise and vibration impacts along the corridor and within the trains themselves
- Particulate matter resulting from the train system
- Impacts on public crossings to and from El Rio de Los Angeles State Park (commonly known as Taylor Yard)
- Impacts on gentrification and affordable housing
- Security for the high-speed rail system and addressing the issue of terrorism
- Impacts that security measures would have on train boarding times
- Safety issues related to schools and colleges along the route
- Safety issues related to the high-speed train being elevated or below grade



- Earthquake safety.

#### Grade Separations/Grade Crossings

While many stakeholders agreed that grade separations are needed, some wondered how pedestrians would be discouraged from crossing into the secure right-of-way. A representative from Congresswoman Lucille Roybal-Allard's office requested detailed information on the number of grade crossings that would be improved within her district as a result of this project.

Additional stakeholder questions and comments provided consist of:

- If high-speed rail goes below grade, can Metrolink also go below grade?
- Existing rail lines and the high-speed rail line should have a grade separation from Cornfield State Park and El Rio de Los Angeles State Park (commonly referred to as Taylor Yard)
- If rail lines go below grade near El Rio de Los Angeles State Park, they should be placed in a tunnel, not a trench
- The trenching done for the Alameda Corridor has divided those neighborhoods and should not be used for this project
- Grade separations should be implemented in hiking and riding corridors, such as the Pacific Crest Trail in the Soledad Canyon area
- An elevated alignment near the SR-14 freeway would work better than an alignment through the canyon area
- High-speed rail should either be above or below grade, since the existing Metrolink rail lines currently cut Palmdale in half
- Emergency vehicles currently run into problems getting to the local hospital in Palmdale because they must first wait for trains to pass
- Elevated rail lines in Palmdale should begin at Avenue S and reach at-grade levels after Avenue P or Avenue M, thereby freeing up Avenue Q
- Avenue S in Palmdale was recently widened to become a major transportation corridor
- Grade separations would improve overall transportation in Palmdale
- Use cut and cover to construct grade separations
- What are the length of intervals between planned overpasses and underpasses with regard to the Central Valley area?
- Will property owners still be able to easily access their large farms and tracts of land?
- Will these large tracts remain intact or be bisected by the project?

#### Station Locations

Representatives from Supervisor Mike Antonovich's office and the Santa Clarita City Council expressed concern over why a station is planned for Sylmar, but not for the City of Santa Clarita. Additional stakeholders inquired whether stations would be located:

- In a median area along the SR-14 freeway
- At or near the junction of the I-5 and SR-14 freeway interchange
- At or near existing Indian Casinos (including Pechanga, near Murrieta)





- At Vincent Station on the other side of Palmdale, where there is more space and less homes
- Between Rancho Vista Boulevard or Avenue P, Avenue Q, 10<sup>th</sup> Street East, and 20<sup>th</sup> Street East in Palmdale, where there is available land
- At Palmdale Regional Airport
- Near the Centennial Project currently under development, which will include a significant number of homes and businesses and will allow for a station stop in Santa Clarita
- Behind the existing Union Station in downtown Los Angeles.

General questions and comments raised regarding the proposed station locations are:

- Will Palmdale Transportation Center be able to handle the additional cars and people resulting from the high-speed rail line?
- The current Metrolink station in Palmdale impacts the surrounding neighborhood, which includes a nearby school and park
- Palmdale Transportation Center may need to be relocated to connect it to other forms of transportation and make it truly intermodal
- Palmdale Transportation Center needs to be linked to Palmdale Regional Airport to support air travelers using bus or train to access the airport
- Palmdale Transportation Center is not the best location for a high-speed rail station
- Travelers will need a convenient connection from Los Angeles to Palmdale Regional Airport
- The current location for a high-speed rail station in Palmdale will not be convenient to those trying to reach the airport because they will have to carry their luggage onto a trolley or shuttle to get to Palmdale Transportation Center
- Additional station location alternatives need to be considered further up Sierra Highway, although Palmdale Plant 42 Heritage Airpark's safety protection zone needs to be taken into account (this safety protection zone is for flying in and out of Plant 42 and Palmdale Regional Airport)
- Since Palmdale is a fast growing city, the current Metrolink stops in Lancaster and Palmdale could be combined into one station stop at a midway point; this would also serve as the high-speed rail station
- Is there competition for station locations in the San Fernando Valley?

Several asked why no stations were being planned for Burbank Airport and Los Angeles International Airport (LAX), and if a shuttle would be provided to link LAX to the high-speed rail line. Another stakeholder wanted details on how the train's schedule might be impacted by the creation of additional stations along the route.

#### General Comments

Many stakeholders along the corridor were eager to learn the timeline for the project, from the environmental schedule through actual construction of the project. One stakeholder suggested that a pilot project be implemented, in order to accelerate the current project timeline.



Regarding fares, many wanted to know how much one-way and roundtrip fares would cost, and asked that they be reasonably priced, especially for local commutes. Some wondered if the high-speed rail project would cause Metrolink fares to increase and if fares would cost more or less than airfare.

Several elected officials and their staff members encouraged the use of partnerships with other agencies, such as SCAG (Southern California Association of Governments) and LAX, as well as the railroads, to ensure connectivity between the different transportation projects being proposed and key destination areas throughout the corridor.

Additional general questions and comments provided by stakeholders are:

- How long before the public would be able to see tangible project benefits?
- Will this project replace Amtrak or Metrolink?
- What benefits will a new alignment provide for Metrolink?
- Does the California High-Speed Rail Authority supersede Metrolink?
- How slow can this train go and still be considered high-speed rail?
- Will the train have a business section?
- Does the project require that you buy locally manufactured equipment?
- Why hasn't high-speed rail already been built in this country?
- How does this proposed system compare to those already in operation overseas?
- Which will be more challenging for this project—long distance travel or the typical daily commute?
- Metrolink should be viewed as a local provider, while high-speed rail will provide longer trips
- What will the train schedule be for the proposed system?
- What type of freight are you anticipating for this system?
- Have studies been conducted regarding the expected ridership?
- To guarantee ridership levels, there needs to be a focus on ways to get people out of their cars and link to other modes of transportation
- Rail lines will not provide better service than buses, but will cost more to use
- High-speed rail will not work in the Antelope Valley because very few people use the existing Metrolink service
- The intended ridership and communities to be served by the high-speed rail have not been made clear
- The State of California should become a leader in high-speed transit by using new technologies and offering real opportunities for progress and development
- The Authority should consider creating a system that could eventually serve the entire West Coast
- The project should include local hiring and allow for a fair process in distributing contracts
- Northern Los Angeles County ridership will be a huge player in future transportation projects.



#### Level of Support and Public Outreach

Many stakeholders expressed their support for the high-speed rail line, but also expressed concern about the level of support for the project and possible opposition from local airlines or other large opposition groups. They urged continued outreach efforts to elected officials and communities along the corridor, as well as the use of advisory groups and other methods to keep stakeholders engaged throughout the environmental review process.

Additional questions and comments provided by the public include:

- What does Union Pacific think about this project?
- What are the major roadblocks for this project?
- Is there a champion of the project in the Legislature?
- Are you actively seeking endorsements from organizations?
- Where should letters of support for this project be sent?
- How can the public access all of the environmental and engineering studies related to the project?
- Who should people talk to if they are interested in joining a project committee at the local and/or state levels?
- High-speed rail will provide many critical benefits for the present and future of the Antelope Valley and will compress space and time between the Antelope Valley and downtown Los Angeles
- High-speed rail will help fulfill the goal of regionalizing air travel in Los Angeles County by making LA-Palmdale Regional Airport a viable facility, which will be even more readily accessible than Los Angeles International Airport (LAX) from downtown Los Angeles
- Project representatives should continue to meet with influential groups and organizations about high-speed rail.